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11. (SBU) Contents

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Israeli Participation in EuroMed Assembly Sparks Controversy

12. (C) As part of the Euro-Mediterranean (EuroMed) Parliamentary Assembly,s extraordinary session held in Rabat November 20-21 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process, two Israeli parliamentarians (Deputy Education Minister Majali Wahbe and Punlun Daniel (phonetic)) participated in the event alongside Syria and other Arab countries. Protesting Israeli participation, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) organized a sit-in on November 20 that drew 50-100 people, according to various Moroccan press sources. The French-language daily L'Economiste reported November 21 that the two Israeli parliamentarians threatened to leave the assembly, saying they did not appreciate being used as a "punching ball" by Arab parliamentarians. Other Moroccan press reported that two well-known Moroccan journalists who participated in the sit-in decided to leave the demonstration after alleged Islamists began chanting slogans against Royal Advisor Andre Azoulay. (NB: Royal Counselor Andre Azoulay is the most senior Jewish official in the Moroccan government and has traditionally served as a Palace,s link to the Moroccan Jewish community and to the Israelis).

Mauritanian President Receives Warm Welcome by the King

13. (U) In his first trip to Morocco since he came to power in early August, Colonel Ould Vall, Chairman of the Mauritanian Military Council for Justice and Democracy (CMJD), was well-received by King Mohammed VI during his two-day state visit to Marrakech November 21-22. Morocco, it seems, pulled out all the stops to welcome the new regime in Nouakchott, as Vall met with the King, Prime Minister Jettou, Foreign Minister Benaissa, and other senior GOM officials. In addition to discussing the overall strengthening of bilateral ties, the King and Vall chaired the signing of three cooperation agreements in the fields of drinking water, fisheries, and agriculture. (NB: Colonel Vall is a graduate of the Military School of Meknes.)

Morocco Renews Demand for Release of Moroccan Hostages in Iraq

14. (U) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation on November 20 released a statement strongly reiterating its demand for the unconditional release of two Moroccan citizens being held captive in Iraq. The two Moroccans, Abdelkrim al-Mouhafidi and Abderrahim Boualem, were taken hostage October 20 by an Iraqi group affiliated with Al-Qaeda. According to the Maghreb Arab Press website, the NeoMaroc association, a local NGO, plans to soon hold a rally calling for the liberation of the two Moroccans and to denounce an "act that is contrary to Islam and all international conventions." The two Moroccan hostages are now featured in a box each day on the front page of French-language daily Le Matin, along with a caption noting how many days they have spent in captivity.

Morocco-South African Relations Still in the Tank

15. (C) TDY South African Charg Janice Strachan told Polcouns November 15 that the GOM continued to drag its feet on agreement for the new South African Ambassador (NB: The previous South African Ambassador departed this past summer and was replaced temporarily by Strachan, a mid-level MFA official. Relations between the two countries plummeted when South Africa recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 2004, prompting Morocco to withdraw its ambassador from Pretoria). Strachan reported that she has access to the MFA when she needs to, but said her government is incensed that the GOM has not even acknowledged receiving the request for agreement. Strachan will end her six-month stint in Morocco in December, and said a temporary successor has not yet been identified.

Istiqlal Opts for Socialist Allies over Islamists

16. (SBU) Istiqlal party executive committee member and upper house parliamentarian, Mohamed El Ansari, told Poloff November 16 that there was serious debate with the committee leading up to party leader Abbas El Fassi's announcement on November 11 that Istiqlal would join forces again with its 2002 elections ally, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces party (USFP), for the 2007 parliamentary elections. El Ansari confided to Poloff that while he and several others on the committee favored an alliance with the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD), especially in light of the USFP's recent courting of leftist opposition parties (NB: Istiqlal is a center-right party), a majority of the committee voted to stick it out with the USFP. El Ansari said that while he will honor the party's decision, which he noted was decided democratically, he does not rule out a day when Istiqlal and the PJD are seen as allies.

Survey Shows Poor Conditions in Moroccan Prisons

¶7. (U) The Moroccan daily L'Economiste on November 22 reported the Moroccan nongovernmental organization, the Moroccan Observatory of Prisons (OMP), had recently completed a survey of prisoners incarcerated in Kenitra, Souk Larbaa, Sale, and Casablanca. According to the daily, the 331 prisoners who responded to the questionnaire revealed that conditions are poor in these four prisons, including physical and mental abuse. Prisoners apparently become accustomed over time to being incarcerated, as the survey indicated reports of abuse decreases as the period of imprisonment increases. Prisoners also described problems with health services and family visits.

Join a Protest, Earn a Quick 30 Euros

¶8. (SBU) PolFSN reported that during a recent visit to Algeciras in southern Spain, he happened upon a pro-Polisario demonstration taking place in the center of town. To his surprise he noticed a number of apparently non-Sahrawi Moroccans participating in the demonstration. PolFSN approached several of the Moroccans to ask why they were demonstrating for the Polisario. "Thirty Euros," was the eager response.
Riley